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RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 1623
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 000185

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [UNGA](#) [AG](#)
SUBJECT: MIXED SIGNALS ON RIGHTS OF FAMILIES OF THE
DISAPPEARED

REF: ALGIERS 171

Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton; reason 1.4 d.

¶1. (U) In Paris on February 6, Algerian FM Bedjaoui signed the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which was adopted in December by the UN General Assembly. According to Algerian press reports, one of the aims of the convention is to provide a judicial remedy for the families of disappeared persons to seek financial compensation. In his public remarks, Bedjaoui stated that such a right to compensation was included in the National Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation, endorsed by Algerian voters in late 2005. (Note: The Algerian government estimates there are more than 6,000 Algerians who disappeared during the terrorist strife of the 1990s. End Note.)

¶2. (U) Algerian NGOs championing the rights of the disappeared have criticized the Charter for freeing members of the security services from any accountability for disappearances. Advocates for the disappeared maintain that closure for the families of the victims will not be possible absent a full accounting for their loved ones (reftel). On February 7, five of the NGOs organized a conference to examine the issue at a hotel in Algiers. About 50 people turned up to participate. Local papers reported February 7 that not among the participants was a Chilean human rights lawyer, whose request for a visa to travel to Algeria was refused.

TURNING OUT THE LIGHTS

¶3. (U) Shortly after the event began at 0900 local time, electricity to the meeting room failed and the room went dark. Organizers of the event, according to an Embassy employee who attended, called for calm and distributed candles to the audience. Offering no explanation for the power failure, the hotel management asked the audience to leave. When the audience refused, Algerian police appeared on the scene and dispersed the crowd, by and large peacefully. The event's organizers hurriedly scheduled a press conference away from the hotel and denounced the government for cutting the power to the meeting room and preventing concerned Algerian citizens from openly debating an issue of importance to the society. They also complained that the government refused dialogue with them and stated that only the "security services and terrorists," at the expense of the victims, benefited from the Charter.

14. (C) COMMENT: It seems clear that the power to the hotel conference room was deliberately cut on the order of the local authorities. Given the nature of the GOA decision-making process, the decision to do so was probably taken at a fairly senior level. To say the least, the government is sending mixed signals. One day it touts the right of the disappeared by signing an international convention; the next, it breaks up a gathering of advocates for the disappeared who take issue with provisions of the Charter. The government's sensitivity about challenges to President Bouteflika's national reconciliation process remains high.

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